

### 13° The Lutheran Reformation and Liberty.

with a hierarchic bureaucracy, which enveloped the nations, at his command. To those who set a higher value on the unity of the Church, even in this despotic form, than on the free development of the human soul, the transaction at Augsburg appears as an unmixed evil. To those who see in an ecclesiastical unity, thus conceived and exemplified, the death of true spiritual, intellectual, political freedom, it was at least a step in the direction of progress. The fact that Luther had won his cause against all the forces of mediaeval tradition and authority, and that his opponents were compelled to own it at Augsburg, is a fact to be thankful for. The prince might take the place of the pope, but there was at least the possibility of escaping persecution by removing from the jurisdiction of one prince to that of another, instead of being haled to the stake for one's religious belief. This might not be toleration in the modern sense of the word, but it was an advance upon the mediaeval alternative of death or absolute submission. The alternative could now be evaded by at least Luther's followers, and the fact is a sign of progress. Still better, it was the beginning of further progress, though in Germany the free development of mind, the vindication of conscience, was trammelled by a long period of fierce strife, stagnant dogmatism.

From the point of view of freedom of thought, the Lutheran Reformation may easily be weighed in the balance and found wanting. It is to be regretted that its spirit was inclined to be so exclusively dogmatic, so hostile to rational views, so little inspired by a tolerant charity. It may indeed be described as a crusade in favour of liberty, but only as the age understood liberty. This, it may be said, was in the natural order of things. Luther and his fellow-reformers, who only saw with the light of the sixteenth century, could not be expected to see with that of the twentieth. True, but we should all the more guard against applying the word liberty to the Lutheran Reformation as if it meant what we to-day understand by it. This is a mistake into which many Protestant writers, who confuse the principle with the practice of the Reformation, have fallen. We may grant, too, that Luther was not really free to go all the length of his principle. He not merely attacked a dominant order of things ; he had